



School-to-Work: Strategies to Expand Students' Horizons

URBAN CHALLENGES

ALL high school educators want their students to graduate prepared for successful adult lives. Achievement of this goal starts with keeping young people in school, engaged in their studies, and informed about the steps involved in making smart postsecondary and career choices. Nowhere are these challenges more formidable than in the country's central-city schools.



Urban schools serve a high percentage of the nation's disadvantaged students. For example, members of the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization of school districts in large cities, educate about 14 percent of America's students. But 61 percent of these students qualify for free lunches, 22 percent are English language learners, and 11 percent are in special education. Urban students also are more likely to have less educated and/or unemployed parents than suburban students,¹ so their families may be less able to contribute to their academic and career development.



When career guidance and college expectations are minimal at home, it is even more essential that high schools play a lead role. Supporting a rigorous academic curriculum with structured work-based learning activities can help illustrate the connections between education and bright futures. School-to-work strategies can be especially effective in creating paths of opportunity for urban students. This brief shares some of these successes.

¹Lippman, L., Burns, S., and McArthur, E. (1996). *Urban Schools: The Challenge of Location and Poverty* (NCES 96-184). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

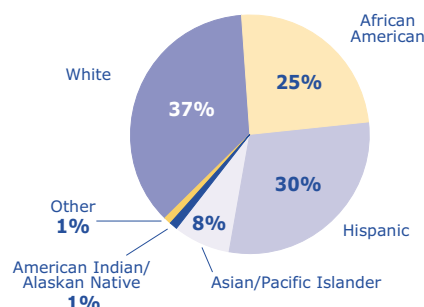


Who Are the Students in Urban Schools?



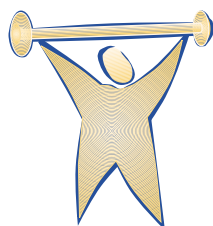
Urban school districts in large and mid-size cities served more than 5.2 million students—11 percent of the nation's students—at the end of the last decade. Nearly two-thirds of these students are in a racial or ethnic minority, and more than one-third are eligible for the federal free or reduced-price lunch program. Research has shown that school-to-work strategies can be especially effective for these urban students.

Racial/Ethnic Composition of Urban Schools in 1997–98



NOTE: Because of rounding, numbers do not sum to 100 percent.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, unpublished tabulations conducted by MPR Associates.



Getting Motivated for Challenging Courses

Participation in school-to-work programs, such

as career academies or structured internships, can encourage students to take the kinds of higher-level courses that are required for admission to postsecondary education. Forty-seven percent of 15- and 16-year-old African-American students in 9th and higher grades say they have participated in one or more school-to-work programs or activities.² Although their grade-point averages are not significantly different from those of non-STW students, they take a much more rigorous schedule of math and science courses. They are more likely to have taken Geometry I, Algebra II, Honors Algebra and other honors math courses, chemistry, and lab sciences (including honors courses) than African-American students who were not involved in school-to-work.

Percentage of African-American Students Taking Advanced Courses

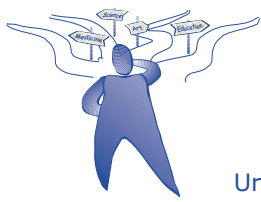
Academic Course Taking	STW Participant	Non-Participant
Geometry	41%	35%
Algebra II	28%	23%
Honors Algebra I	29%	23%

SOURCE: Adapted from Bishop, J., Mane, F., and Ruiz-Quintilla, A. (2000). *Who Participates in School-to-Work Programs? Initial Tabulations*. Ithaca, NY: Bishop Associates.

The pattern is similar for at-risk career academy students who have intensive school-to-work experiences. They tend to earn more academic credits (48 percent vs. 32 percent) and at least 3 years of English, social studies, math, and science (14 percent vs. 6 percent) compared with their peers who do not participate in school-to-work.³

²Bishop, J., Mane, F., and Ruiz-Quintilla, A. (2000). *Who Participates in School-to-Work Programs? Initial Tabulations*. Ithaca, NY: Bishop Associates.

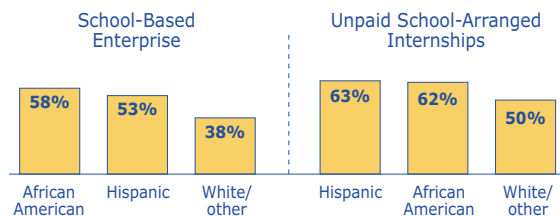
³Kemple, J., and Snipes, J.C. (2000). *Career Academies: Impacts on Students' Engagement and Performance in High School*. New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.



Learning About Career Paths

Urban educators have said their secondary students are less likely than other students to have learned from their families about career opportunities, the education required to start down a career path, or the relevance of their high school education to future success. School-to-work activities such as internships, job shadowing, and school-based business can teach these lessons. Minority students who participated in such activities have found they helped clarify career goals, according to a follow-up survey of 1998 high school graduates.

Percentage Finding Work-Based Learning Activities Very Helpful



SOURCE: Haimson, and J., Bellotti, J. (2001). *Schooling in the Workplace: Increasing the Scale and Quality of Work-Based Learning*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.



Making the Move to Postsecondary Education

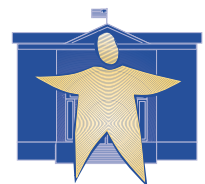
School-to-work programs include strategies designed to ensure smooth postsecondary transitions for high school graduates. Boston's Pro-Tech program, which immerses students in healthcare internships and other work-site learning experiences, is one example. Nearly three-quarters of the African-American students who completed high school in 1993, 1994, and 1995 were still enrolled in college or had completed a degree in 1997, compared with 65 percent of their peers who were not enrolled in Pro-Tech.⁴ Other data show that at-risk students in career academies are more likely to take the SAT or ACT exams (34 percent vs. 23 percent) and to have submitted college applications (50 percent vs. 36 percent).⁵

⁴DeSalvatore, L., Goldberger, S., and Steinberg, A. (2000). *From Innovative Programs to Systemic Education Reform—Lessons From Five Communities*. Boston: Jobs for the Future.

⁵Kemple and Snipes. (2000). *Career Academies*.

Staying in School

Students' participation in school-to-work programs significantly reduces their likelihood of dropping out of school, according to an analysis of data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.⁶ Los Angeles career academy students are no exception. Their average 1999–2000 attendance rate was a full percentage point higher than non-academy students. Also that year, an average 3.6 percent of non-academy students dropped out of school, but only 2.1 percent of career academy students dropped out.⁷ These results are consistent with a national evaluation that found career academy students are less likely to be chronically absent from school than randomly assigned control group students.⁸ Almost every study shows that students in school-to-work have better attendance than comparable students, and none of the studies says students come to school less often, notes a recent review of the school-to-work literature.⁹



⁶Rivera-Batiz, F.L. (2000). *The Impact of School-to-Work Programs on Minority Youth*. Paper presented at Temple University conference.

⁷Butler, M. et al. (2000). *School-to-Career Models in Los Angeles: The Academy Approach*. Pasadena, CA: Public Works.

⁸Kemple and Snipes. (2000). *Career Academies*.

⁹Hughes, K.L., Bailey, T.R., and Mechur, M.J. (2001). *School-to-Work: Making a Difference in Education*. New York: Institute on Education and the Economy.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Career-focused programs can be a lifeline to students in urban areas. In the snapshots below, school-to-work coordinators in selected urban school districts describe the positive difference their programs have made in the lives of students.



A Boost from Business

In 1997, Chicago Public Schools moved to a career-cluster system. Of 105,000 high school students, about 60,000 take some type of "education-to-career" (ETC) course. The most visible difference so far, says Michael Sailes of the ETC office, is increased support from area businesses, which have helped upgrade industry standards in high school courses (including computer programming and networking), secured staff development for teachers, and made students more employable. In 2000, Chicago high school students collectively earned 10,000 college credits offered through ETC. "We ensure these students have some type of learning experience outside the high school," Sailes says.

100 Percent College Bound

All 45 students in the first graduating class of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center were accepted into college in 2000. This is a remarkable achievement for the high-poverty district in South Providence, Rhode Island. The Big Picture Company, proprietor of this "laboratory" school (called The Met by its students and teachers), says mandatory internships are key to its success. Students spend two days a week, six hours a day, learning and applying their newfound skills and knowledge at local businesses. "Most of these kids have parents who don't have college degrees, and many come from single-parent households that are below the poverty level," explains The Met's Cal Wolk. "We give our students respect, we expect them to take college-level courses and learn about careers. In this environment they thrive."

Transitions for All Students

Miami-Dade County, Florida, has worked hard for the past six years to "institutionalize" school-to-career so its 350,000 students will continue to benefit from a seamless pre-K-12 system. Beginning in the elementary grades, students get monthly lessons from business volunteers, tour businesses, and learn to appreciate the importance of being on time and coming to work every day. Middle school students organize portfolios of their work and receive more guidance about high school academy options. High school students may choose an internship experience through their academy program while taking rigorous academics that meet college entrance requirements. "Transitions are very important here because we have so many immigrants coming in who are not familiar with the educational system," says STC coordinator Lucia Herrera.

Realizing Potential

Ruth Rivera exemplifies the difference school-to-work can make in the life of an urban adolescent. Ruthie was the product of an impoverished west Philadelphia neighborhood—a failing student well on her way to becoming a statistic of a community in crisis. Things began to turn around during her first year of high school, when her school-to-career counselor got her an internship at First Union Bank. Her success, along with encouragement and support from her parents, teachers, and mentors, motivated her to make up the credits she had failed in 9th grade. She completed both her freshman and sophomore credits in a single year. By senior year, Ruthie was an A student with a scholarship from First Union and admission to Temple University, where she is now pursuing a career in human resources.



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This brochure is part of a series designed to focus on the individual elements that make up a successful school-to-work system.